

# The Missional Family

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Simple ways to live out the gospel in everyday family life

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# On Mission With Your Children

*John Murchison*

Before Jesus ascended to heaven, he left his disciples with the following words:

*And Jesus came and said to them, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.” (Matthew 28:18-20 ESV)*

Clearly, going and making disciples must be a high priority for all who follow Jesus. Some families are called to go to the nations, to proclaim the gospel among those who have not had a chance to hear.

Their stories are certainly inspiring, and hopefully many more families will join them. However, not everyone will respond to this call to make disciples by going abroad.

As we see in Acts 1:8, this command of Jesus to make disciples is not just for those going to the “end of the earth.” Jesus commanded his followers to be his witnesses both near and far:

*But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.” (Acts 1:8 ESV)*

So what does mission look like for those of us who are not going abroad? How can families best obey this commandment of our Lord to make disciples and be his witnesses right where they are?

## **Not Activity, But Identity**

Sometimes, when a family hears this call to mission, what they actually hear is that they need to “do more things” in order to be on mission.

And if the calendar is already full, as it often is, the message to make disciples can feel like a heavy burden rather than the easy yoke that Jesus promises in Matthew 11:30.

If your family’s calendar is indeed full, the chances are that your family is coming into close, regular contact with those who do not have faith in Christ. Your son’s soccer team, your daughter’s theater class, your PTA meeting, your Gymboree class – these are all mission fields ripe for the harvest.

What most families need is not to do more things, but to live out their calling as a missionary in the things they are already doing. To be on mission, families don't need a shift in activity, but a shift in identity.

As Christians, we are not people who “do ministry.” We are ministers. We are not people who “do mission.” We are missionaries.

And as we live out our identity as missionaries, we will start to see our everyday activities as opportunities to be witnesses for Christ. As Peter puts it,

*But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light. (1 Peter 2:9 ESV)*

## **Giving to Those in Need**

Parents need to involve their children on mission to those who are less fortunate than they are. Scripture is replete with examples of God's people sharing their possessions with those who are in need, and we do well to follow this example.

As you go about your daily lives, you will encounter others who are less fortunate than you. Children are usually eager to be on mission to those in need, and parents need to encourage and support this godly desire.

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## **Mission as Discipleship**

As parents lead their children on mission, they aren't just benefiting others, they are benefiting their children as well. As James rightly points out, a faith in Christ that does not lead to mission and good works is no faith at all:

*What good is it, my brothers, if someone says he has faith but does not have works? Can that faith save him? If a brother or sister is poorly clothed and lacking in daily food, and one of you says to them, "Go in peace, be warmed and filled," without giving them the things needed for the body, what good is that? So also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead. (James 2:14-17 ESV)*

If we want to demonstrate a faith to our children that is alive, a faith that can save them, we need to live our lives on mission.

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*If we want to demonstrate a faith to our children that is alive, we need to live our lives on mission.*

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# 3 Ways Your Kids Can Help You Love Your Neighbors

*John Murchison*

When Jesus was asked what the greatest commandment in the law is, He said “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.

This is the great and first commandment” (Matthew 22:37-38, ESV). He then proceeds to share that the second greatest commandment is to “love your neighbor as yourself” (Matthew 22:39, ESV).

Luke records an account of a man who, hearing the commandment to love his neighbor, asks Jesus to clarify who exactly He means when He says “neighbor.”

Jesus goes on to tell what we know as the story of the good Samaritan, the point of which is that our neighbor is anyone in need, no matter the circumstances (Luke 10:25-37).

# Becoming intentional

In their book *The Art of Neighboring*, authors Pathak and Runyon suggest that many of us have misapplied this teaching of Jesus.

While it is true that Jesus is calling us to love everyone, too many of us have turned that sentiment into a general feel-good statement, and the result is that we don't actually love any individual people in a specific, sacrificial way.

One way to tell how well we are obeying the second greatest commandment is to look at our relationships with our actual, physical neighbors – the people who live next to and across from us.

Do we know their names? Do we pray for them? Do we have them in our homes? Do we have more than surface-level conversations with them? Do we look for and take advantage of opportunities to talk about Jesus with them?

I know I have a lot of room to grow in loving my neighbors as I love myself, and I imagine most of us would say the same. The good news for parents is that you have a huge advantage in getting to know and love your neighbors – your children!

Kids have a great ability to break down people's defenses and to open lines of communication. The command to love your neighbors is one command of God that can be easier to obey with your kids than without.

Here are a few ways that children can help us know and love our neighbors:

## **1) Starting Conversations.**

I find it's easier to start a conversation with someone at the neighborhood restaurant if our kids are playing together. I've also found many people start conversations with me when my kids are with me, simply asking how old they are and where they go to school.

## **2) Meeting New Neighbors.**

While anyone can bake cookies and knock on a neighbor's door to say "welcome," something about having a child with you makes this act less intimidating.

## **3) Spending Time Together.**

If you meet neighbors with kids the same age, it's easy to make plans to get together at a neighborhood park, to go on a walk together, or have a playdate at one of your houses.

These are just a few ways that kids are an asset in taking the first step toward knowing and loving our neighbors.

# When Is Safe Too Safe?

*Kim Blackaby*

It was one of those nights on the Canadian prairies. The violent thunderclaps, flashing lightning and gale force winds had brought us to this place – hiding in the basement.

Why the basement? My mother had a profound fear of thunderstorms and the further she could get from the noise and tumult of the storm, the safer she felt. So my mother, my sister, and I headed underground. But that night my 12-year-old mind began to question why? Was it my own fears or my mother's that drove me to the basement?

I realized that I had been taught to be afraid and that, in fact, I rather enjoyed watching the light show the heavens were providing. That night I went upstairs and never retreated to the basement again.

In what ways do we teach our children to fear? We naturally want our children to be safe and have a healthy fear of some things, but when do reasonable precautions become hindrances to fully enjoying and experiencing life?

We live in a culture of hyper-safety and fear. It is a world of litigation, caution signs, and ever more rules and restrictions designed to keep ourselves and our children “safe”. We can be so afraid to do the wrong thing or face any discomfort and pain that we do nothing.

We play it safe.

When Jesus said, “Whoever wants to be My disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross daily and follow Me” (Luke 9:23), He indicated that He was not going to safe places.

He was going to places that might be uncomfortable, unfamiliar, and dangerous – even to the point of death – even death on a cross.

Those words are as difficult to hear today as they were then. Does our playing it safe extend to following Jesus as well? Can our desire to protect override our desire to obey?

I am certainly not advocating reckless spiritual thrill seeking, but perhaps it is time to rethink some of our choices. No parent wants their children to suffer or to be put in harm’s way, but we can so carefully control their lives to minimize risk of danger that we push faith out.

Following Jesus requires knowledge of God and where He is going. Where would Jesus go? Where is He leading you? Where is He asking you and your children to trust Him?

In the church I grew up in, we were encouraged to follow Jesus even if it led to uncomfortable places. As teenagers we would travel several miles to small prairie towns on cold winter nights.

We went to lead Bible studies for teens at mission churches. No adult accompanied us nor were there cell phones then. Was it risky? Perhaps, but we depended on God and experienced Him showing up. When cars broke down and all we could do was pray that He would send someone to help, He did – and our faith grew.

Allowing teens and children to step out and do what they believe God is calling them to, even with risk and uncertainty, builds faith.

My teenage friend, Mallory, is currently in Haiti trekking to villages out of the reach of modern communication, risking Chikungunya Fever, working in uncomfortable conditions at a medical clinic, because this is where Jesus is leading her. Her parents pray, her parents trust, and her parents let her follow Jesus.

Perhaps it is time to ask ourselves where we have we hesitated, held back, and hindered our children from following God in order to be safe.

*This article was originally posted on Weave (weavefamily.org). Weave exists to align the hearts of families with God's global purposes by equipping them to define, embrace, and live out their unique role in advancing the Kingdom, growing to their fullest potential in Christ. See their website for more articles like this, and for activities for your family to engage with and learn about God's global purposes.*

# Two Lies That Keep Families From Being Missional

*John Murchison*

When talking with parents of young children about the idea of being in a Missional Community, of joining a small group of believers who work together to declare and demonstrate the gospel, I usually get one of two responses.

Parents either say,

*“Sounds great! Where should I drop my kids off? Or will you send a babysitter to my house?”*

Or, they say,

*“That sounds great for other people, but right now I have children, and my primary calling is to disciple them. Maybe once they’re grown up, then I can join a Missional Community.”*

For some reason, many parents have an underlying assumption that they can't do both of these things at the same time. They feel they must choose between being in a Missional Community or spending time with their children.

I don't think parents who say these things are bad people. Quite the opposite, in fact. I think they are trying to be faithful to what God is calling them to both as parents and as Christians on mission. And they're frustrated by the fact that they don't think they can do both well.

I've been wondering where this underlying assumption comes from, and I think it largely stems from two lies that we, the American church, have told them: the lie of Christian age segregation, and the lie of event-based Christian ministry.

## **The Lie of Christian Age Segregation**

In the American church today, it's far more common for families to learn about God separately than to attend church events together. Unless it's a purely social event, like a potluck or a picnic, church members expect there to be some place to put their children, and we have by and large accommodated them.

As a result, most activities or events of a church involving worship, Bible study, prayer, and the like are completely segregated by age. Children over here, students (or youth) over there, and parents in the other building. We've lied to parents, telling them that the most vital parts of church life must be separated by age.

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Before you start thinking I only support a family-integrated church, let me be clear: I'm a big fan of age-specific teaching on Sundays. I believe that Sundays are best utilized for parents to connect with and worship God, getting "filled up" for another week of teaching, leading, and discipling their kids throughout the week.

I also think that children need to be taught the Word of God in a way that speaks directly to them. I like Sunday children's ministries. In fact, a big part of my job is leading one.

That said, I think that if every spiritual church event is segregated by age, then we are missing out on all that the family of God is meant to be. It is good for children to hear adults discuss the Scriptures, pray, and sing.

It's good for adults to invest in the lives of children other than their own. It's good to worship God together, from infants to adults. I believe that can be done well in a small group of believers, in a Missional Community.

Are there times in a Missional Community where children should not be included, due to the nature of the discussion or event? Of course.

But I believe that those times are few and far between. For most of the gatherings of your Missional Community, having children involved is perfectly acceptable, if not beneficial.

We've got to get rid of the lie that children should be neither seen nor heard at church, and especially in our Missional Communities.

## **The Lie of Event-Based Ministry**

In the interest of serving the people of God, churches today tend to make an event for everything. Want to pray? Come to prayer meeting!

Want to meet other members of our church? Come to our potluck! Want to study the Bible? Come to Men's/Women's Bible Study! Want to serve others in the city? Come to our Saturday Serve Day!

Events are useful, and they can't and shouldn't go away. However, I worry that what the proliferation of Christian events communicates is that the Christian life is lived in spurts of specific activity.

Subtly, and unintentionally, the lie is told that ministry is primarily made up of discrete, individual events.

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*The Christian life can and should be lived intergenerationally.*

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For a person who knowingly or unknowingly believes this lie, it's easy to see how overwhelming the Christian life can become.

If you try to block out individual time blocks for Bible study, evangelism, serving the poor, prayer, discipling younger believers, investing in dating your spouse, growing in knowledge of God, volunteering at church, connecting with Christian community, accountability, teaching the Bible to your kids, praying as a family... and on and on... it's easy to see how your calendar can reach its breaking point pretty quickly.

When you add to the calendar all the other events of family life, from sporting events to dance practices to orchestra rehearsals, it's easy to see how many families opt out before even trying.

Because of the lie of event-based ministry, many parents feel there's just not enough time in the week for a Missional Community.

## Relieving the Pressure

The Bible calls us to all of the things I listed above, and more. However, the Bible also emphatically states that our walk with God should not be burdensome.

As Jesus says,

*Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.” (Matthew 11:28-30, ESV)*

This is good news for those who are feeling overwhelmed by the activity of the Christian life. Yes, we are to serve and lead as the Bible calls us to, but this should result in rest for our souls, not burden. But how can we get there?

The truth is that a Missional Community, when properly lived out, can help dispel the lie of event-based ministry. Rather than one more thing to add to your schedule, it can be a way to integrate these many activities together.

Through a Missional Community, you can encourage other believers, learn from God's Word, serve others in the community, share the gospel with nonbelievers, and disciple your children. All these can be integrated together, over time.

Through dispelling the lie of event-based ministry, Christianity stops being a lot of things you do, and starts being an identity that you live.

*\*A Missional Community can be defined as a small group of disciples of Jesus on mission to make more disciples of Jesus. For more information, download this free e-book titled [Missional Community Made Simple](#).*

# Our Closest, Forgotten Mission Field

*Ben Connelly*

There are many answers to the question, “who is my mission field?” But as I often tell parents, there’s no one with whom our lives are more shared than spouses, kids, parents, and siblings.

Everyday mission must not neglect our actual, immediate and extended, family. The City Church has a 2:1 ratio of adults to kids. Some City Groups are at 2:1 . . . kids to adults!

We see believers occasionally get a not-yet-believing spouse to join them on a Sunday morning. But it’s often easier to get them into someone’s home for a cookout or movie night.

We know parents who grieve their children’s souls. And we know children—college-aged and middle-aged—who beg God for their parents’ and siblings’ salvation.

# God's Call to the Family

Throughout the Bible, God turns His people toward the home. After giving the Shema in Deuteronomy 6, God commands Old Testament Israel to teach this crucial declaration to their children in as many everyday ways as possible.

This sentiment is echoed throughout the Old Testament, as God instructs His people to make His ways known to their “children and your children’s children”.

Later, Jesus famously invited children to Himself, even as His disciples pushed them away. And He often used elements of children’s faith as a metaphor for the Kingdom of God.

Some of Jesus’ own family members were among His first followers: two of his brothers penned biblical letters, and His brother James was leader at the world’s first church.

Family imagery fills the most common metaphors for the Church in the New Testament. Patriarchs and matriarchs of a family are baptized “with their [household] as well”.

Still true in much of the world today, extended families in Bible times all lived in one home. When a child got married, a room was added to the house and life went on. Children apprenticed to continue the family business. Fathers led families as patriarch pastors.

Missional leader Mike Breen (not the sportscaster; this one has an awesome British accent) explains that the Greco-Roman oikos

(“extended family”—a group of 20–70 people) was a primary venue for the gospel spread in the early church. He argues that since families were close-knit, if one person began following Jesus, family members often followed—thus the “household” references in Acts.

We don’t live in homes of twenty people today. At most, parents or in-laws may live with us, or a sibling for a season. We might follow Chevy Chase’s example of a full house for the holidays, but everyone goes home. We may not live in the same city, or even nation, as our parents.

The most often we might see anyone outside our immediate family is at a reunion. In that context, they might be as excited to talk about Jesus as they are about the commemorative iron-on t-shirt your aunt insists on making everyone.

But unless your family is uniquely blessed, there are likely people in our own genealogies who don’t follow Jesus; some probably reject Him outright.

## **Our #1 Priority?**

We must close with an important question: is family a more primary mission field than non-family? Jesus’ own family became believers. But He did not seem to allow His heartstrings to be tugged exclusively to His parents and siblings.

“Whoever loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me, and whoever loves son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me,” while “everyone who has left houses or brothers or sisters or

father or mother or children or lands, for my name's sake, will receive a hundredfold and will inherit eternal life”.

Before they believed He was the Messiah, Jesus' family rejected Him. But that did not deter Him from his mission to fishermen, tax collectors, and prostitutes.

At one point when His family sought to speak to—and likely distract—Him, His response seems downright harsh: “Who is my mother, and who are my brothers?’ . . . He said, ‘Here are my mother and my brothers! For whoever does the will of my Father in heaven is my brother and sister and mother’”.

As everyday missionaries, we pursue mission wherever God has sent us. So on one hand, our family is the closest, most heartfelt mission field.

On the other hand, we must guard against “family idolatry”—putting more value on our families, simply because we have longer history and an abiding love for them than our neighbors and co-workers.

So is mission to family primary? It must not be lost as a priority, but the safest biblical line to draw is that we must guard our emotions, motives, and idols from making it the priority.

We must neither ignore our families for the sake of everyday mission, nor ignore everyday mission for the exclusive sake of our families.

*Adapted from Week 2 of A Field Guide for Everyday Mission (Moody, 2014): “WHO Is My Everyday Mission Field?” For related material, [grab a copy here](#). Free sample and resources at [everydaymission.net](http://everydaymission.net)*

# 4 Ways To Serve Others With Little Ones At Home

*Angela Suh*

Ah, I feel I am just now emerging from the great fog that surrounds moms with newborns and toddlers at home. My kids are now 6, 5 and 3 – which means that we survived days with three kids ages three and under.

I've watched some old videos recently and thought back to those days where showers were few, the house was a constant disaster and more often than not there was spit-up on my clothes or in my hair (so gross).

I know those days are often difficult, lonely, mundane. I had many days where I just felt like I was operating in an isolated bubble,

disconnected to everyone. I wanted to still serve others, but what could that look like with these littles in tow?

Here are a few things that worked for me in this particular season:

## 1. Pray

I know, that seems so simple, right? Honestly, before I had children, I don't think I really had much faith in or understanding of prayer. The book, *A Praying Life* by Paul Miller, was so helpful in getting me started.

When you are stinky, sleep-deprived and bound to your couch while you nurse your infant, you can still pray. As you scan through Facebook and read status updates, you can pray. When you are up at 4 a.m. and all is quiet, you can pray.

As you are walking around your neighborhood pushing the stroller along, you can ask God to move in the hearts of these people.

Anywhere and at all times, we can pray . . . and God has so much that He intends to do through the prayers of His saints.

## 2. Write Encouraging Letters, Texts, and Emails

I want to do such a better job at this. In just a few minutes, you can write thoughtful words and send them to someone. I have been on

the receiving end of these words and man, even three sentences jotted down or a short text can make such an impact.

For those other moms like you that are out there, feeling alone or struggling with how God is working in them in this season – all the Truth that you need to be reminded of, they need it, too.

And as you write, more often than not, God is reminding you as well. So many times I've texted something about God's sovereignty and His working all things for our good and His glory – and then I've looked around and realized that yes, this is true, even for me, even right now.

### **3. Meals**

Likely, there are people that you are connected to that are sick, or having babies, or having a difficult time, and they could use a meal dropped off at the door so there is one less thing they need to worry about in a day.

Now, when I sign up to deliver a meal – it is usually the only single thing that I plan to get done that day. Between naps and changing diapers and tantrums – I know it can seem impossible to get even one thing accomplished.

But, having received meals in times of transition or grieving, I know it means much to the person that you have made such an effort for. I have felt so so loved by people showing up and hugging me, giving me food and asking how things are going.

## 4. Have People Live With You

This is obviously a little more involved than the previous ideas. I've written before about having people live with us, but I want to say again – it is both wonderful and difficult, both blesses you and stretches you. We've had people live with us during various seasons, including when we had little babies.

We've mostly had women who were college students, family members or about-to-be-marrieds. Though opening up your home does provide a room and a bed, it also serves people by allowing them into your lives, to be a part of your family, which I've found is so much more of a blessing.

Being a mom with young kids at home is a special season with all sorts of wonders and joys, and limits and responsibilities. Some days, serving your family and keeping the kids alive is all you can do. But, other days there is grace to do a little more and to serve the Body, even amidst the craziness and chaos.

# The “How” Of Kids And Missional Communities

*John Murchison*

Being a family that is part of a Missional Community is not only possible, but in many ways helps both your internal mission to your kids and your external mission to others.

In other words, being a part of a Missional Community is a great way to be on mission to and with your kids.

In a Missional Community, you are on mission TO your kids by involving them in a Christian community where they can see the gospel on display by the way that you love each other in Christ.

*“By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.” – John 13:35 ESV*

A Missional Community also gives you the opportunity to be on mission WITH your kids. Your children have the ability to open doors to talk to people that might normally be closed.

In addition, the activities you do with your children often put you in close and regular contact with other parents that might not yet have heard and believed the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Some families are reluctant to even try to have a Missional Community because their lives are so busy with their kids.

Others, however, are eager to be a part of a small group of people on mission, but don't know what that would look like. For these families, they don't have a "want to" problem, they have a "how to" problem.

To support and equip these families, I am starting a short series on what it might look like to include your kids in a Missional Community.

## **No "One Size Fits All"**

I say "what it might look like" because there is no "one size fits all" model for how to do Missional Community in general, much less how to do Missional Community with kids.

However, I hope that offering some thoughts on different types of group gatherings will be helpful, and that each family can take some ideas from this series and apply them to their specific community.

At The Austin Stone, we encourage our Missional Communities to pursue three main practices:

- To gather as a community in a Family Meal
- To gather as disciples in Life Transformation Groups, or LTGs
- To gather as missionaries in a Third Place

We'll take each of these practices one at a time, starting with the Family Meal.

## The Family Meal

In short, a Family Meal is an opportunity for the community to gather together around a meal to eat, talk, share life, rejoice with those who are rejoicing, and mourn with those who are mourning (Romans 12:15).

It's less like a Sunday School class that happens to meet in a home and more like a gathering of extended family over food.

The Bible certainly is a frequent topic of conversation, but it's less like "Everyone open your Bibles to Philippians 3," and more like "Earlier this week, I read this passage of Philippians that I wanted to share with you."

Here are a few best practices for gathering with children in a Family Meal setting:

## **Make It A True Family Affair**

If we wanted to hold a Bible study, we would probably need to arrange childcare. But the purpose of this gathering is not Bible study, but for believers to connect as a family!

Let go of a vision of a quiet, orderly, calm dinner and embrace a warm, lively, and sometimes loud dinner where the kids are a part of the community. You wouldn't hire childcare for Thanksgiving dinner – you don't need to do it for your Family Meal, either.

## **Earlier Is Better**

If you don't start your Family Meal until 7pm, then everyone is probably checking their watch often to see bedtimes creep up and then pass by. Start as early as possible! If a few people can't arrive until a bit later, that's ok.

## **Don't Count Out Sunday Afternoon / Evening**

Sometimes families feel like they shouldn't hold their Family Meal on Sundays, since we've already done one church event that day. But there's no such thing as too much church family on one day, and many of our Missional Communities have found great success with a Family Meal that starts at 5pm on Sundays.

## **Share The Parenting Load**

One of the signs of a healthy Christian community is a shift from seeing the children in the community not as “their kids” or “my kids” but as “our kids.” Don't just engage with your own children,

but with others in the community, too! Ask the tired mother of a newborn if you can feed the baby her bottle instead.

Volunteer to get down on the ground and play trains with the toddlers while the other parents get a breather. And graciously receive help from others when it comes time for you to sit and talk with the other adults in your community while someone else is helping with your kids.

## Life Transformation Groups

The Life Transformation Group (LTG) is a practice where groups of two or three people of the same gender meet weekly to study the Bible deeply and to be known deeply. Each Missional Community will consist of several LTGs that meet regularly. At these meetings, participants aim to do three main things:

**Hear and Obey** – recap what they heard from the Lord in their personal times in His Word, and share what obeying the Scriptures looks like personally

**Repent and Believe** – confess sin to each other and remind each other of the good news of Jesus’s life, death, and resurrection

**Consider and Pray** – think together about opportunities to share the gospel and pray by name for unbelieving friends

## Not Kid-Friendly

An effective LTG where members are confessing sin and diving deep into the Scriptures is not an environment that is kid-friendly.

Children should not be listening in as members confess their sin, and the conversation about the Bible will usually be above the age level of our younger children.

That said, the three aims of an LTG (Hear and Obey, Repent and Believe, and Consider and Pray) are great goals for conversation with your kids in your own home. A version of the LTG meeting could certainly be incorporated at a mealtime or bedtime for your family.

## 5 Helpful Tips for Parents in LTGs

Even though children are not going to be active participants in the LTGs of your Missional Community, I still have a few simple tips on how to make this practice work in your communities.

1. **Working parents that have a stay-at-home spouse** – set your alarm clocks. If you have a typical work week, and your spouse is able to stay at home, early mornings tend to be the best time to meet. Find a location with good, strong coffee to wake you up and start your day with Biblical community and encouragement. The early time also adds to the consistency of the group since very few work or social obligations will conflict.
2. **Stay-at-home parents with kids in school** – meet right after the kids leave for the school day. I know you only have a limited number of hours to run errands, work around the home, and do other things while the kids are at school, which is why I recommend meeting before the craziness of the day hits. Get the kids bundled up and off to school, then head straight to meet with

your LTG. This will likely be the most stress-free part of your day, allowing you to enjoy the time and not feel hurried.

3. **Stay-at-home parents with preschoolers** – choose your location wisely, and set aside a lot of time. My wife is currently in this stage of life, so we know first-hand how difficult it can be to have a good, quality LTG meeting for a group of two or three parents of preschoolers. Try and find a location where the kids can play, such as a restaurant with a playground, or one of the LTG members' homes. But no matter the location, there will still be plenty of interruptions, from snack requests to diaper changes to mediating disputes. For that reason, I recommend setting aside more than the standard hour usually recommended for LTGs. Instead of trying to get “in and out” of your LTG, set aside the whole afternoon for a play date or hangout time, and work your way through the LTG over the afternoon.
4. **Families where both parents work outside the home** – plan “special times” with the kids. If both parents have a standard work week, it will be difficult to make a weekly LTG time work for both parents. I recommend planning a “special time” for one parent to spend intentional relational time with the kids while the other parent is at their LTG. For instance, a family could make Tuesday night “Dad Game Night” where Dad always plays board games with the kids while Mom is at her LTG, or Mom could take the kids to get donuts every Saturday morning while Dad is at his LTG.

5. **Dads – serve and bless your wives.** Men, if your families include preschool-aged children, and your wives' LTGs often include taking care of the kids at the same time, be intentional about planning time for your wives to spend some "kid free" time together. Plan ahead, get the calendars out, and send your wives out to dinner, brunch, coffee, or whatever they enjoy. This will go a long way in deepening the relationships in your wives' LTGs.

## Third Place

Most small groups in churches meet in either a church building or in a home, which are great places to deepen and build relationships in Christian community.

In our experiences with personal evangelism, however, we have found these two places (church and home) to be an intimidating place to invite your non-believing friends when you want to introduce them to your Christian community.

That showed us the need for a Third Place – a place where your Christian community and your friends that do not believe in Jesus can connect with each other.

Our prayer is that through the Third Place gatherings, relationships can be built that will open the door for personal evangelism to happen naturally.

As your Christian community demonstrates the love of Christ for each other, we pray that our unbelieving friends will be drawn to

want to know more about this God that causes such sacrificial love for others.

## The Dependable Third Place

Many Missional Communities choose to set a dependable time and place for their Third Place. Their group chooses a certain event or location that they will all try to go to at an agreed upon time, whether that is weekly, every other week, or once a month.

The advantage of having a regular time and place for your Third Place gatherings is that you always have something to invite a coworker or friend to if the opportunity presents itself. In addition, your group will have the opportunity to meet and get to know other “regulars” at that location.

For groups including families, here are a few Third Place gathering locations that have worked for a dependable, regular meeting time:

- Playgrounds on Saturdays
- Restaurants with playgrounds during dinner on weeknights (finding a “Kids Eat Free” night is a bonus!)
- High school football games – this is especially effective if some of the group members have children on the team
- Grilling burgers in a group member’s front yard
- The neighborhood donut shop on Saturday mornings
- Swimming at the neighborhood pool on Saturdays in the summer

In short, find something you and the other families in your Missional Community would have fun doing on a regular basis, then do it, and be intentional about inviting neighbors, coworkers, and others to join!

## The Spontaneous Third Place

For some groups, having the whole group meet at the same time and same place on a regular basis works great. For others, it can be hard to get everyone's schedules aligned. For those groups, I recommend pursuing what I call "the spontaneous Third Place."

To have a spontaneous third place, ask the following two questions about the things on your calendar:

1. Can I include members of my Christian community in this event or task?
2. Can I include some of my unbelieving friends in this event or task?

If the answer to both is "yes," you have a Third Place!

## 4 Types of Spontaneous Third Places

Let's look at 4 different ways this could play out:

1. **Your Kids' Events.** For families with kids in school, much of your calendar may revolve around school events, from fundraisers to festivals to performances to sports practices. Be intentional about meeting and building friendships with some of the parents there. There's a good chance that you'll run into them again at events in the future. In addition, invite along a member or two of your

Missional Community. It will be really great for the other parents at your school to see your Missional Community coming out to support your kids, even if (or especially if) they don't have kids of their own at the school!

2. **Exercise.** My wife loves walking the Town Lake Trail, a community trail in Austin, TX, pushing our two little girls in a double-stroller. Whenever she goes, she texts a few of the women from our church along with a few of our neighbors that she knows are not out at work. No matter where or how you exercise, you could always bring along others with you!
3. **Home Projects.** Working on your car? Painting a room? Building a deck? Whatever home project is on your "to-do" list, I guarantee it will be more enjoyable with friends. Invite people from your MC along with a few other friends who don't attend church, and you've got a very productive Third Place meeting.
4. **Fun.** Everybody's gotta have fun from time to time, right? Whether you're having a date night, a family DVD night, or a day at the park, think intentionally about who you could bring along with you!

With a little thought and planning, almost any part of your week can be a great way to involve your friends that don't yet know the Lord in the life of your Christian community. I encourage you to begin to think through your schedule in this way, and pray that the Lord uses these times to bring men and women to Himself!

# 11 Simple Ways To Disciple Your Kids On Mission

*Seth McBee*

One of the questions we get many times at the GCM Collective is, “What about kids? How do you have time to disciple your children during all this mission stuff, and what does it look like?”

I have three kids. I own a business and participate as an executive team member of the GCM Collective. Not to mention I coach leaders around the world and travel for speaking and training events.

How do I have time? I learned early on, from my brothers at Soma Communities, that I only have one life, and mission has to be part of my everyday life, not some other life that I need to live.

I don't have time to get into all of that teaching, but it transformed how I see mission and discipleship. Needless to say, I've decided to serve and leverage my life as much as I can. I'm busy and you are probably busy, too.

How can we disciple kids in the midst of such hectic community and mission filled lives?

## **1. Redeem everyday things**

What TV show does your kid love to watch? Watch it with them and tell them that at the end we are going to discuss questions in which we see ways the characters are living out their identity, how are their lives looking like Jesus, how are their lives showing who/what they are trusting, etc. For my kids, it's Phineas and Ferb. We sit down and watch it, then discuss.

The night before I wrote this article, we spoke about servanthood, identity, idols, fears, anxiety, the Imago Dei, etc. After we discussed, we prayed as a family for very specific things that we discussed.

Guess what the kids are always asking to do? "Daddy, can we do Phineas and Ferb and theology?" They desire to learn because it is something they enjoy.

## **2. Use accessible resources**

Teach them from material they will enjoy and let them teach and dialogue through it. I personally use two resources: The Jesus Story Book Bible and the Story of God for Kids.

When we go through these resources, I am always asking questions to get their insight. These resources are great because there are pictures and questions and really gets the kids involved, instead of just sitting there and listening.

I also allow my 10 year old to lead through this so he can learn what it looks like to lead and create discussion. In this I am able to disciple him in what it looks like to lead by allowing him to do it himself.

But don't let it end on merely discussing, ask the children how they could focus on acting on what they've just learned. Give them an action plan on how they can obey the passages or lesson.

### **3. Discipline like you believe in the gospel**

I learned this from John Piper some years ago. He simply asked, "Does your discipline mirror grace and the gospel or legalism?" My kids never know when they are going to be punished for a sin.

I try to sit them down after they have sinned and walk through grace and mercy and the effects of sin. We get to the heart of the issue of their sin, instead of saying, "stop it!" There are times when they are not punished for their sin, and we speak a lot about grace.

There are also times when their sin causes natural consequences. For example, they might leave a favorite toy outside when they were supposed to bring it inside and it gets ruined.

When this happens, we merely point out the consequence and pray together for forgiveness and reconciliation. When you spend time

demonstrating in discipline what grace, the gospel and reconciliation looks like, it hits the heart.

## **4. Demonstrate the gospel**

I got this idea from my buddy Caesar. One of the discipleship issues we had with our older child had to do with his behavior while he was playing outside. We decided that if he was having issues playing outside, he would have to come inside or face punishment. The punishment was to sit on the wall for 20 minutes. Lots of fun. Instead, when the time came for him to receive his punishment, I told him I'd take it for him.

We talked about Jesus and the good news and how he has done this for us. This sounded great, but he listened, and then ran back outside like nothing happened. I still do this, because I think at some point, it will sink in. But you have to know: they are kids and they won't always react in the ways you were hoping.

## **5. Praise them often**

When you see your child do something that reminds you of Jesus, tell them and praise them for it. Not to the point where they get all the credit, but as a pointer. When they see how their actions depict God's character, it really freaks them out.

My 7-year-old last night asked, "God works through me to show who he is?" It really hit him. Our kids need to hear about God, not only when they are doing things that are disappointing, but also when they are showing the fruit of the Spirit.

Recently, my 10 year old came up and told me that his little brother made him lunch for school. He was stoked! I told him, “Caleb, where do you think he learned that?” He replied, “God?” I said, “He learned it from you as you have been serving him. And you learned it from God as Jesus served and serves you. You have been showing your brother Jesus. Isn’t it amazing that he does those things he sees in you as you show him Jesus?”

## **6. Remind them that they are loved**

Continue to remind them they are loved by God and you, no matter what. We do this in both their sin and their praise. We want them to continually know that God loves regardless of their actions.

Their identity and acceptance is not wrapped up in what they do but in who God is and what he does. I do this when they do something that requires discipline and I do this when they show off who God is.

## **7. Involve your kids in the mission**

Rarely do we do things that don’t involve our kids. When we do events, most of the time it is with families. The reason is I want my kids to see that it is totally normal to be around those that don’t believe like us and what it looks like to hang out with them.

I don’t want them to ever think that our job is to do things so we’ll get something in return. We merely show others what God is like, we plant, we water, but God causes the growth.

The best way to do this is to model it for them in life on life. So, at neighborhood BBQs or neighborhood breakfasts, they have jobs

before and after. We talk about why we are doing these, what their thoughts are, and their struggles with it. They get to walk this out and deal with the consequences of following Jesus: when their toys get broken, when they have to clean up after others, etc. When all this happens, we get to talk about what it means to serve and show off Jesus without expecting anything in return.

## **8. Make your house the “hang-out-house.”**

Our kids know that they can always have friends over and invite them in for dinner, etc. Because of this, they are actively sharing their lives with those around us. They see what it means to have an open home, to be hospitable, to believe that our possessions are God’s and not ours.

They also know that to open our home means there will sometimes be kids they don’t want to play with, but we open our home anyway. We love our enemies, we don’t hate them or shun them. The more you allow your kids to have people over and just hang out and play, the more they will be able to understand mission in the everyday.

## **9. Invite their friends and parents out to your activities**

Recently, I took my boys to a movie and dinner, so I asked them who they wanted to bring. I then invited their friends and their family to go out with us. Again, this is simple. Their friends and families came and hung out. We were already going to do it, why not do it with others?

This doesn’t mean we eat dinner and ask the other Dad, “You see the bread on your kid’s plate? That reminds of when Jesus said he was

the bread of life.” Be a good human and hang out with others, be friends, show your kids what it looks like to be hospitable in all areas of life.

## **10. Get them involved in giving**

Ask your children what charity they’d like to help on their birthday. We have done this with both our older kids. We tell them, “Mom and Dad will buy you a gift, and so will your grandparents, but what if we had your friends bring something for a charity?”

We have had food drives, blanket drives, and more for one of our missional communities that helps the homeless in our town. Our kids actually love doing this! They get to help others and participate in serving.

## **11. Make theology practical**

At the start of each week teach an aspect of the Sermon on the Mount (Ensure you keep it centered on being good news and not a list of "to-dos") or talk about an attribute of God. Each family member thinks through how they will carry out that aspect to friends, neighbors, family and strangers for that week to show off who Jesus is.

Throughout the week speak on and seek how everyone is engaging that aspect both personally and in community. Both for personal insight and missionally.

At the end of the week share stories of triumphs and disappointments. Remind, in each circumstance, the finished work of Jesus, on our behalf, through the Spirit for the glory of our Dad.

## Wrapping it up

I know these things aren't earth shattering ideas. They are simple everyday life type of activities. That's the point. We don't need some program to raise our children for us, we can do this in normal, everyday life. That way our kids will understand what following Jesus looks like and will desire to do it, too. Some days are better than others, some things work better than others. You know your family.

A simple way to start is just to look at your schedule with your family and start asking, "How can we be more intentional with these things we are already doing so our children can better understand who God is, what he has done, who he has made us?" What can we do to holistically disciple our children, their head, heart, and hands?

Just think if your parents taught you about God while watching cartoons? Pretty cool parents, pretty fun way to learn theology.

# Contributors

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